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THE TRIAL OF JESUS

A Judicial Review of the Law and Facts of
the World's Most Tragic Court
Room Trial

BY

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I

INTRODUCTION

PERHAPS no event of the brief but remarkable career of Jesus of Nazareth is of such abiding interest to both lawyer and layman as the great legal tragedy that resulted in his crucifixion. During the centuries that have elapsed since that memorable event, much controversy has been waged over the question of the legality or illegality of the prosecution conducted against him. Religious prejudice and superficial reading have led to two widely divergent views regarding the

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question. Christians generally conclude that he was put to death by a mob of irresponsible men without any attempt to conform to the law of procedure then in force.

On the other hand, it is claimed by certain Hebrew apologists that he was an offender against the Jewish laws, was guilty of a crime punishable by death, and that he was regularly tried, condemned and executed according to existing laws.

The writer will endeavor to show that both of these views are, in the main, erroneous, and that instead Jesus was charged with a specific offense under existing laws, was tried by a regularly constituted judicial tribunal, but that the whole procedure was permeated with such gross illegality and such flagrant irregularities that the result can be considered nothing short of judicial murder.

INTRODUCTION

The simple Gospel account reveals the various steps that were taken in the trial, but does not describe them in legal terms. The lawyer, versed in Jewish and Roman jurisprudence, can readily read between the lines and tell the story from a legal viewpoint. This it is proposed to do in these pages, confining ourselves to the facts and the law applicable to the case, and giving the subject such treatment as is applied to any other matter presented for judicial inquiry. The presentation may be likened to a lawyer's brief in review of a case on appeal.

It is obvious, for the purpose of the discussion, that we lay aside for the time all thought of the divine nature and character of Jesus; that we consider him a mere man, a citizen of Judea, and, like any other citizen, subject to the jurisdiction of her courts and amenable to her

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laws; that we bring to the investigation a mind freed as far as possible from existing prejudice and open to conviction; that we be governed not by any notion we may entertain relative to the propriety of his trial, but by the law under which it was professedly conducted.

So we are here concerned with the inquiry whether Jesus, considered as a mere man, was guilty of a crime punishable by death under the law; whether the great legal maxims designed to safeguard the rights of accused persons were properly applied in the course of his prosecution. It must be remembered that inasmuch as his prosecutors did not recognize his Messiahship, he was entitled to the same protection which the law guaranteed to the most humble citizen.

II

THE JEWISH LAW

THE Ten Commandments, proclaimed to Moses amid the thunders of Sinai, constitute the substance and essence of the greatest and most enlightened system of jurisprudence ever promulgated. From these fundamental principles the great law-giver of Israel evolved a system of laws which was destined to give character to the jurisprudence of the ancient as well as the modern world. This great law, refined and enlarged by the nobler dispensation of him who came to fulfill and complete it, forms the basis of the codes of the most civilized nations of the modern

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world. While the Mosaic code marked an epoch in the history of legislation, it was not until the advent of Christianity that it became a powerful judicial agency in a world of law and order. The substance and essence of that great law remain, but many of its rigid features have been abandoned as incompatible with the spirit of true freedom and brotherly love proclaimed by the Prince of Peace.

The principles of the Mosaic law are to be found in the first five books of the Old Testament, otherwise designated the "Pentateuch." These precepts constituted the substantive law of the ancient Hebrews. An elaborate collection of traditions and precedents purporting to be based on the principles of the Pentateuch was compiled under the title of *Mishna* by Rabbi Juda near the close of the second century. This work constitutes the first

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part of the Jewish Talmud, and purports to embody the oral law as well as to elucidate the written or Mosaic law. While it contains many beautiful and noble things, its language is often uncouth, corrupt and unintelligible. Its allusion to the trial of Jesus is decidedly apologetic and shamefully false from beginning to end, if we are to give any credence whatever to the record of the Four Gospels.

This desultory statement of the Hebrew law, written one hundred and fifty years after the crucifixion of Jesus, is not to be accepted as the law applicable to his prosecution, conviction and execution. The law as laid down in the Pentateuch is the only law applicable to the case, and from these sacred writings may be gleaned every principle governing the trial of a criminal case at the time Jesus was tried.

It is deemed important that we here

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mention such of the many wise and humane provisions of this remarkable code as are pertinent to our discussion, and which we shall follow in their application to the most memorable trial in all history. One principle that deserves our most profound respect is the positive injunction that there should be but one law alike for Israelite and alien, and that the stranger must be kindly treated.

Another noteworthy provision was that no man could be convicted of a capital offense on less than the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act. One witness was regarded as no witness. It required two or more whose testimony must agree and relate to one and the same offense. An accused person had a right to employ counsel or to have counsel appointed to defend him. He could not be compelled to be a witness against himself,

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and even his voluntary confession was not competent to convict him.

Circumstantial evidence was not admissible against the accused, and every presumption was indulged in favor of his innocence until a final verdict of guilty was pronounced. The trial of a person charged with a capital offense had to be conducted in public, and no evidence could be produced in his absence. The trial of a capital case could not be held in the night-time, on the Sabbath, or on a festal day, and no sentence could be executed on such days. Sentence upon a verdict of guilty could not be pronounced until the third day after the finding, and then only after a second vote resulting the same as the first.

Every precaution was taken in behalf of the accused in the production of testimony. All witnesses for the prosecution

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were required to be admonished, before giving their testimony, to remember the value of human life and to take care that they forget nothing that would tell in the prisoner's favor. The exhortation which the presiding judge addressed to each witness was: "It is not conjecture, or whatever public rumor has brought to thee, that we ask thee; consider the great responsibility that rests upon thee; that we are not occupied by an affair, like the case of pecuniary interest, in which the injury may be repaired. If thou causest the condemnation of a person unjustly accused, his blood, and the blood of all the posterity of him, of whom thou wilt have deprived the earth, will fall upon thee. God will demand of thee an account, as He demanded of Cain an account of the blood of Abel. Speak." All witnesses testifying against the accused, were re-

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quired, in case he be convicted of a capital offense, to take an active part in inflicting the death penalty, in order to add greater certainty to their testimony.* The witnesses against the accused were the only prosecutors as well as the only executors. A false witness was subjected to the same penalty he sought by his false testimony to impose upon the accused. From the first step of a criminal prosecution to the last moment before final execution, no caution was neglected, no solemnity was omitted, that might aid the prisoner's acquittal. The whole procedure was so guarded as to convey the idea that the first object was to save the accused.

It was an axiom of this law that the function of the court was to save and not to destroy human life. The tests applied

**Salvador, Histoire des Institutions de Moïse, etc.,*
Liv. IV, Ch. II, p. 76.

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to judges, to prosecuting officers, and to accusing witnesses as to capacity and impartiality were more rigid than those known to exist anywhere else in the world. Among no peoples of which we have any record can we find a criminal code so explicit, so humane and embodying so many of what are now considered the essential elements of enlightened jurisprudence.

III

JEWISH COURTS AND CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

THE administration of justice among the Hebrew people in the time of Jesus was entrusted to three classes of Courts. First in point of inferiority was called the "Court of Three." It was composed of three judges, one chosen by each party to the litigation, and the third selected by the two thus chosen. No legal qualifications were required of the members of this court, as any citizen might be chosen to act as a judge in a particular case. Any question of law arising on the trial was submitted to the Minor Sanhedrin or

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lower Council of Elders. These latter courts existed in every town of more than one hundred families and consisted of twenty-three judges each, appointed by the Great Sanhedrin sitting at Jerusalem. These courts had jurisdiction of lesser crimes and misdemeanors. An appeal would lie from a verdict of the Minor Sanhedrin to the Great Sanhedrin.

This latter court was the supreme tribunal of the Jews and the one before which Jesus was tried and convicted. This court had original jurisdiction of crimes punishable by death, of offenses involving the peace and majesty of the people, and of crimes committed by public officials. The origin of this great court has been ascribed to Moses under the direction of the Almighty to "Gather unto me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the peo-

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ple, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee." "And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons." This body of seventy, chosen by Moses and presided over by him, constituted what has been variously called "Grand Council," "Council of Ancients," "Gerusia," "Great Synagogue" and "Great Sanhedrin." The last name is of Greek origin, meaning a "setting together." This august body was made up of two presiding officers, a religious chamber of twenty-three priests, a law chamber of twenty-three scribes, and a popular chamber of twenty-three elders. This is the court Jesus referred to when he said

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to his disciples that he "must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed."

Extreme care was exercised in the selection of the members of this great court. No man in any way interested in the result of a trial could sit as a judge in this court. Aged or childless persons were disqualified, as were also usurers, adulterers, bastards, and persons without a fixed trade or business. The members of the court had to be Hebrews. They had to be versed in the law and familiar with the language of surrounding nations. The Mishna would have us believe that the Sanhedrin was composed entirely of rabbis, or learned doctors of the law, but this claim is refuted by the evidence of Josephus* and the New Testament.

**Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. XXVI, p. 294.

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The sessions of this court were held in the temple at Jerusalem, and it was a violation of the law to meet elsewhere. When this court sat as a trial court in criminal cases, twenty-three members constituted a quorum. They could not act as prosecutors nor accusers, but under the law were required to protect and defend the accused. As both judges and jurors, it was their sole duty to determine the question of guilt or innocence according to the law and the evidence. Under the law of procedure in this tribunal the first step was the arraignment of the prisoner. This consisted of reading the charges in open court by an official known as the auditor or candidate, and corresponding to our clerk. These charges were based on an accusation previously made before the proper officer by some person familiar with the facts. Next came the introduc-

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tion of testimony against the accused, after which the accused was given an opportunity to offer his defense and introduce witnesses in support thereof. At the conclusion of the evidence one of the judges made a brief summary thereof, whereupon all spectators were removed from the court room and the judges proceeded to ballot. Two scribes tabulated the votes, one taking down those cast in favor of acquittal and the other noting those in favor of conviction. It required a majority of two or more of the quorum of twenty-three to convict, and if any of the members desired additional evidence before voting the number of judges was increased by adding an equal number of each of priests, scribes and elders until the full number of the Great Council was reached.

If a majority of the court as now con-

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stituted voted for acquittal, the accused was set at liberty; but if the majority vote was for conviction no announcement of the finding could then be made. At least one day must intervene between the vote of conviction and the pronouncement of the verdict of guilty and the sentence. During this interval the judges could not be occupied with any matter that would divert their minds from the case. After the morning sacrifice on the third day following the vote for conviction the court must return to the judgment hall and proceed to take another vote. A judge who voted to condemn originally might now change his opinion and vote to acquit, but one who voted to acquit at the first hearing was not now permitted to change his opinion and vote for conviction. Under the law it was the duty of the court to defend the accused, and a verdict of guilty

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without some member of the court having interposed a defense was invalid.* Also a unanimous verdict of guilty was considered as indicative of a conspiracy against the accused, that he had no friend or defender, and that the verdict was arrived at without mature deliberation. Under the law such a verdict had the effect of an acquittal.

The court was prohibited by law from entering upon the trial of a criminal case on Friday, the day before the Jewish Sabbath, for the reason that such trial could not be conducted on the Sabbath, nor could it be postponed over the Sabbath. Any indignities inflicted upon the accused during the progress of his trial subjected those who committed them to the same punishment as if they were inflicted upon one not accused. The presumption of innocence attended the accused until a

**Martyrdom of Jesus*, by Rabbi Wise, p. 74.

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final verdict of guilty was pronounced, and until then the court was bound to protect him from insult or injury.

With this summary of the fundamental rules of practice and procedure applicable to the trial of a person accused of a capital crime, we are prepared to inquire to what extent they were applied in this great trial, whether Jesus, considered as a mere man, was accorded such protection as he was entitled to under the law. But before we proceed with that inquiry it might be of interest to note some of the arguments that have been put forth in defense of the legality of this trial. In a recent discussion of this trial by Doctor S. Srinivasa Aiyar, the author in his contention for the legality of the trial says: "If the trial of Jesus was illegal in its detailed aspects, it was but one of many others which have been held of equal gravity and

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with like penalty—death—since; and it may be added the same errors in law and judgment are the almost daily creatures even of this day of enlightenment and progress.”

One can scarcely imagine a lawyer attempting to justify the errors in his case by citing like errors in another case. It is true that many just and innocent men and many pure and noble women have yielded up their lives in obedience to the mandates of corrupted judicial tribunals; it is true that representatives of greed and selfishness have often made the courts their instruments for inflicting the most merciless sentences on those who opposed them in the most legitimate way, but such examples of maladministration of the law can not be cited as precedents in support of the validity of similar outrages committed in contempt of law.

IV

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE RECORD

THE record of the arrest, trial, conviction and execution of Jesus is taken from the narratives of the Four Gospels. These narratives are generally conceded to be true, but owing to a disposition on the part of some persons to question this record, a word relative to its authenticity is deemed appropriate. When subjected to the test to which other evidence is subjected in human tribunals, these narratives will be found worthy of implicit belief. Their genuineness admits of as little doubt, and is as susceptible of as

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ready proof as that of any ancient writings. It is a familiar rule of evidence that all ancient writings, whether documentary or otherwise, coming from the proper repository, are presumed to be genuine, and are admissible as proof of the facts to which they relate without direct proof of their authenticity. If they bear no marks of forgery, the law presumes that they are genuine, and they may be read in evidence, unless the opposing party is able successfully to impeach them.* This is precisely the case with the writings of the Evangelists. They have been used in the Church, as the standard of faith, from time immemorial, and thus are found in the place where they would most naturally and reasonably be expected to be found. They may be received as the narratives

**Greenleaf on Evidence*, sec. 510.

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and writings of the men whose names they respectively bear, made public at the time they were written. It would be the height of absurdity, in view of the rule of evidence alluded to above, to require any further proof of the genuineness or authenticity of these sacred writings. By the same rule, the burden of proving them false or spurious rests upon the objector. These narratives contain all the facts and circumstances pertaining to the arrest, trial, conviction and execution of Jesus, and by all the rules of evidence must be accepted as an authentic record.

Is this testimony worthy of belief when considered in the light of the rules by which we determine the credibility of evidence in courts of justice? In the first place let us see if these men were honest. There is a common presump-

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tion of charity in favor of any witness testifying in a cause, a charity which "thinketh no evil." They are presumed to speak the truth in the absence of a motive to falsify. What motive had the Evangelists in reciting falsehoods? The great truths they declared were against their worldly interests. They took their lives in their own hands in teaching a doctrine which might be construed as inimical to the laws of their country. The interests and passions of the ruling class were against these teachings. Their Master had recently been put to death as a malefactor by the sentence of a public tribunal for beginning a work which he ordained they should carry forward. In propagating this new faith, all they could expect was contempt, opposition, persecution, imprisonment and death. It is inconceivable that they would

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wilfully invent falsehoods the direct and certain result of which would be to destroy their prospects for worldly honor and happiness, and insure their misery in this life.

The slight discrepancy in their narratives is proof that there could have been no previous concert among them, and their substantial agreement shows that they were independent narrators of the same great transaction. Probably the strongest reason for believing that these men spoke the truth lies in its strict conformity to human experience. On the alleged ground that the miracles attributed to Jesus are impossible of performance, the objectors claim the Evangelists were either deceived or were deceivers, and in either case are unworthy of belief. Without refuting the arguments made in support of the claim against the

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possibility of miracles, we suggest that such a doctrine deprives humanity of any knowledge, or even rational belief, in the existence or character of God.

Another view that may be advanced in support of the credibility of these sacred witnesses is their correct agreement, in many matters of detail, with collateral and contemporaneous facts and circumstances. While very little of the literature of the time when these narratives were written has come down to us, yet what little there is has been found to confirm the Scriptures, and to reconcile that which seems contradictory.

On the other hand an attempt has been made to disprove the Gospel account of this great legal tragedy by a certain document called *Acts of Pilate*, and which is alleged to have been found among some rubbish in the streets of

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Turin, Italy, more than a thousand years after the crucifixion of Jesus. This document purports to contain a detailed account or record of the proceedings made by Pilate and sent to the Roman emperor. This document can not be accepted as the record in this case for the reason that if it were found at all, it was not found in a place where it would most naturally and reasonably be expected to be found. Under the rule relative to the admissibility of ancient documents which we have referred to, this instrument must be excluded. Its genuineness may also be refuted on the ground that it was originally written in the Hebrew language. It is highly improbable that a Roman would make a report to his government in a language other than that of his native country. The contents of this instrument are not only contrary to the

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Gospel narratives, but many of its statements are so utterly unreasonable and absurd that a further consideration of it would simply be a waste of time.

When viewed in the light of reason and common sense, and when tested by the rules of evidence, the Gospel narratives must be accepted as the only authentic record of the events as they took place. There is no competent evidence to the contrary in either profane or sacred history. In the language of the immortal St. John, "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."

V

JEWISH FACTIONS AND CLASSES

IN THE further development of our subject the reader will see the significance and importance of an understanding at this point of the various classes or factions among the Jews at the time Jesus entered upon the active part of his ministry; their origin and nature, their distinctive characteristics, and their allegiance or antipathy toward one another. It must be remembered that at this particular time the Jews were under Roman subjugation. Becoming divided by factions and irreconcilable sects, they had

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been compelled to surrender their sovereignty and to succumb to the power of Rome.

The original patriots in the struggle of the Jews against foreign aggression were known as Assideans. They were also the truly religious class of the nation. Their descendants and successors, under the name of Pharisees, separated themselves from the rest of the Jews and proceeded to claim a monopoly on religion. They soon degenerated into a class of greedy hypocrites, and used their religion as a mask behind which they hid their corruption. Piety with them was a sort of trade through which they made secure their hold on the people. They enslaved the people by a system of unwritten traditions of indefinite antiquity, known as the tradition of the elders, and which they contended was of higher

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authority than the law itself. They were intolerant and fanatical in their adherence to the senseless and oppressive formalities of these traditions. Ceremony with them was everything and morality was nothing. Instance their frivolous and senseless restrictions regarding the observance of the Sabbath, while at the same time they sanctioned an impurity with which their own lives were often stained.

When a religion has sunk to the level of superstition without having lost its external power, it becomes more than ever tyrannous and suspicious in its search for heresy. In the time of Jesus the people were not only being tyrannized over by an idolatrous conqueror, but were being held under the rigorous bonds of this religious fanaticism. In spite of their extravagant professions of piety, the

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Pharisees resorted to every contemptible device to evade the law when it interfered with their own inconveniences, and they even stood ready to ally themselves with their enemies in defense of their absurd formalities.

But it must be remembered that not all the Jews classed as Pharisees were of the type we have just described. We have alluded only to that class which has been termed "dyed and varnished" Pharisees; the class Jesus denounced as "hypocrites," a charge fully confirmed by the Talmud. Besides a large following that were simply dupes, there were many notable men of that once heroic national party who, although they were members of the Sanhedrin at the time, took no part in the proceedings to put Jesus to death. Conspicuous among these were Gamaliel and Nicodemus; men known

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and revered for their great learning and nobility of character.

Another class, called Sadducees, were formerly the aristocratic ruling party of the nation. The temporal power having been wrested from them by the Romans, they practically ceased to exist as a separate party, and were reduced to minor positions in Judean affairs. The highest office given them was that of high priest. The Roman procurator usually appointed a Sadducee because of the more friendly relation of that class to the Roman rule. In the matter of religion the Sadducees were rationalists, while the Pharisees, as we have seen, were extreme ritualists. They rejected the oral law or tradition of the elders, and adhered strictly to the written law, while the Pharisees were sticklers for the oral law. These two sects were also divided on the

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doctrine of the resurrection, the Pharisees affirming and the Sadducees denying that the dead would rise again. The Sadducees had no reverence or regard for the people; consequently they had no popular following. But owing to their wealth and their official positions they were capable of wielding much influence and authority, which they used for their own selfish purposes. Their insatiable greed prompted them to employ every method of extortion that their authority afforded. They belonged to the same class of human parasites that has infested society in all ages.

Another class comprising the partisans of Herod, were called Herodians. They were Jewish royalists, and for this reason were usually opposed by the Pharisees and Sadducees, although the latter class bore the same friendly relations toward

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the Roman authorities as did the Herodians.

It will be shown how the teachings of Jesus were antagonistic to the doctrines and interests of these factions, thus giving rise to a desire for his destruction and a concerted movement to accomplish that desire.

VI

THE PROMISED MESSIAH

BEFORE entering upon a discussion of the trial proper, it is appropriate that we speak of the attitude of the Jewish mind toward the promised Messiah. The exponents of the Scriptural prophecy had themselves conceived and taught an erroneous theory regarding the nature and character of the Messiah. The people had been taught and were looking forward with intense expectation to the appearance of a temporal king, a political ruler who would restore the pomp and splendor of the reigns of David and Solomon. They did not realize that the

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kingdom alluded to by the prophets was to be spiritual and not temporal, and they hoped that when the babe of Bethlehem was born he would come as one who would lead the hosts of Israel to victory and overthrow the power of imperial Rome.

Among this singular people, burning with impatient expectation, appeared the meek and lowly Nazarene. When he announced that his kingdom was not of this world their fond hopes fell to the ground. They could not understand what he meant. A few, however, whose minds had been enlightened by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, saw in his coming the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. To such he was the promised Messiah, the Christ, the divinely appointed witness of the truth that makes men free.

VII

JESUS' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PEOPLE

FROM what we have said it is hoped the reader may be able to picture to himself the state of Judea when Jesus, at the age of thirty, entered upon the active part of his ministry. He loved his countrymen and greatly deplored their misfortunes. He saw them deprived of their political independence, their judiciary degraded, the spirit of their law sacrificed to its letter, and their religion reduced to a system of senseless and oppressive formalities. He saw them staggering under an enormous burden of

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taxation imposed upon them by the Romans and the oppressive Temple tithes and tributes. Touched by the distress of the people, he exclaimed, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." This can not be construed as an attempt to make himself their king, but only as a recommendation that they reunite for the common weal.

The people loved to hear him speak, marveled at his wonderful powers, and followed him in vast throngs wherever he went. He gladdened the hearts of the poor and lowly, and ministered unto their temporal wants by healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, restoring sight to

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the blind, and even raising the dead through the power of God. He uplifted them spiritually by preaching charity, humility and love, and a perfect holiness of heart and life as essential to the favor of God, whose laws he expounded and demonstrated in all the depth of their spirituality. He comforted the down-trodden and the oppressed by holding out to them the promise of infinite and eternal life.

VIII

THE PHARISEES AROUSED

AT FIRST the Pharisees manifested only wonder and astonishment at his teachings and an intense interest respecting his mission on earth; but as his power and popularity with the people increased they became envious and alarmed. As long as he went about the country drawing after him a small company of peasants, they let him alone. But now the matter was becoming serious. They felt that their pride had been wounded and their power threatened. They saw that his doctrine did not conform to their ceremonial religion, and threatened directly their positions and fees.

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Religion was their greatest and perhaps their only business. They were shocked at what they regarded a violation of their traditions. His doctrine of faith, love, justice and mercy was wholly different in character from theirs and was preached by the roadside, on the mount, by the lake, or in the house of the sinner. While they were overawed by his wonderful power and majesty, they were dubious of his real character and mission.

At first they did not venture upon an open rupture with him, but vented their ill humor on the disciples by asking them why their master ate with publicans and sinners. The spirit which actuated their murmurings was not by any means the spirit of sincere and outraged piety. Much of the enmity and opposition which he excited was due to his disregard of their frivolous and senseless restrictions

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regarding the observance of the Sabbath. He had not hesitated to heal the sick or minister unto the needy on the Sabbath, claiming the Sabbath was made for man, rather than man for the Sabbath. When he healed the paralytic on the Sabbath, and told him to take up his bed and walk, the Pharisees were up in arms to defend their favorite piece of formalism.

Another absurd tradition held by this sect was that to neglect the washing of hands before eating was equivalent to homicide and involved a forfeiture of eternal life. When they saw the disciples sit down to a meal with unwashed hands, they rushed up to Jesus and demanded, "Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders, for they wash not their hands when they eat bread?" He made answer only by citing numerous and more serious infractions by themselves of their absurd rites.

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It will be observed that Jesus scrupulously avoided making any announcement that he was the Messiah. To have done so early in his ministry would have served no good purpose, and probably would have carried him to the throne instead of the cross, and thereby deprived the world of the great object of his mission. As an instance in which he manifested an intention to withhold the knowledge of his true mission, he said to the leper whom he had cleansed, "See thou tell no man; but go thy way." The healing of leprosy was thought by the Jews as characteristic of the Messiah, and this was evidently his reason for enjoining this man's silence. However, he informed a sufficient number to attest his miracles and proclaim his religion, leaving enough in ignorance to condemn and crucify him.

IX

OPPOSITION OF THE SADDUCEES

THE opposition of the aristocratic Sadducees had its inception in the first public cleansing of the Temple. The priests regarded this place as their exclusive domain, and had set up their shops and carried on their dishonest trafficking within its sacred walls. Up to this time this class had played but a very small part in the opposition to Jesus; but now he had interfered with their methods of extortion and had attempted to cut them off from one important source of revenue. Naturally they became enraged

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and at once began to plan to get rid of him.

The fear of popular indignation was the only thing that restrained them from violently laying hands on him and putting him to death. They dared not proceed openly against him in the face of such overwhelming popular sanction of his words and his works. It would have been a vain attempt to found an accusation against him at this time, and doubtless would have recoiled on their heads. So they planned to inveigle him into some fault that would stem the tide of popular approbation and at the same time form the basis of an accusation against him.

X

SPIES AND PAID INFORMERS

IN ORDER to accomplish this, they resorted to the infamous practise of sending out spies and paid informers whose mission it was to heckle him and to entangle him in his public discourses. The record says, "And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor." These paid emissaries plied Jesus with all manner of subtle and intricate questions, but he was as supremely wise as he was supremely good. He answered them with consummate wisdom and invincible patience.

XI

ALARM AT THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

THE alarm of both these sects was greatly heightened by the raising of Lazarus after he had been dead four days. This act conclusively proved the falsity of the doctrine of the Sadducees regarding the resurrection of the dead. Also the performance of this miracle was regarded by the Pharisees as characteristic of the Messiah. There now arose a fear common to both these sects that the raising of Lazarus would lend a great impetus to the growing influence of Jesus, and tend to make him a king, and so

ALARM AT RAISING OF LAZARUS

end in Roman intervention and the destruction of the political existence of the Jews. The Sadducees, having no popular following, now allied themselves with the Pharisees in a conspiracy for the ruin of their common enemy. Thus we see two classes, ordinarily opposed to each other, were now joined in an ill-omened scheme to crush a reformer whose zeal was inimical to both.

XII

MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN

IT WAS at this stage of their dilemma that the Sanhedrin met in a spirit of hatred and perplexity. One Joseph Caiaphas held the office of high priest at this time and presided at this meeting. In his address to the assembly he said, "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." He was not aware that in that statement he was bearing witness solemnly, though unconsciously, to the great sacrifice about to be made.

MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN

His words, when transformed into a higher meaning, carried the principle that the innocent can pay for the guilty, that the death of one man can become the salvation of all. Here was the presiding judge of the highest court of the nation, at a consultation of the priests and Pharisees, declaring Jesus deserving of death. This was not the pronouncement of a decree, as there had been no trial, but it was simply the individual opinion of the high priest made in advance of the trial, and which disqualified him under the law from taking any part in the trial.

Nothing was said at this consultation concerning any crime Jesus was supposed to have committed, but the burden of their meeting was "If we let him thus alone all men will believe on him." They were all in accord that it was essential to take Jesus by subtlety or fraud and kill

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him. Only Nicodemus here opposed the rest by saying in defense, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" A few words of reproof soon silenced him. They said to him, "Art thou also of Galilee?"

This council did not render a preliminary decree, as some have contended, nor did it authorize the issue of an order or warrant for the arrest of Jesus, but it did make a fiat, at first secretly issued, that he should be put to death regardless of whether he was innocent or guilty of a crime punishable by death under the law. This fiat soon became generally known. Jesus was informed of it, and from that hour he lived with a price upon his head.

XIII

JESUS' RETIREMENT

IT WAS now within a few weeks of the great tragedy. Jesus retired to a secluded place to prepare himself for the final ordeal which he knew was soon to terminate his earthly mission. In the meantime his enemies published an offer of a reward to any one disclosing his whereabouts. Their object in locating him was not to arrest him and bring him to trial according to law, but they unquestionably meant to deal summarily with him on sight. That this was their intention is clearly indicated by the record of their consultation. It says they "consulted that they might

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take Jesus by subtlety or fraud and kill him." Their attempt to keep this fiat a secret savors of subtlety and fraud. That such was their intention is also shown by the fear expressed in the council regarding the matter. "But they said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people." If they were intending to give him a legal hearing, why should they fear it?

XIV

THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

THE record does not inform us of the duration of Jesus' retirement, but he reappeared upon the scene a few days prior to the fatal passover. This annual feast was a great occasion in the city of Jerusalem. It had long been the custom of the Jews to assemble once every year in the great city to celebrate their deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh. It was usually held during the first week in April and lasted for three days. All secular occupations were laid aside and forgotten in order that all might participate in the services of the occasion. The

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courts were prohibited by law and custom from transacting any business on these three days of solemn and impressive ceremonies. It has been said that as many as three million people visited the city on this occasion. Vast numbers flocked to the great city from every section of Judea. Every thoroughfare leading into the city was filled with pilgrims, and when the Galilean caravan moved down the highway near the town of Ephriam, Jesus and his disciples joined it.

No pen can describe the solemnity of soul struggling with the natural anguish of the flesh as the Savior trudged along that Jordan road to Jerusalem, there to meet death in its most cruel form. He knew the time for his great sacrifice was nearing, and he strode along in all the majesty of sorrow, silent save an occa-

THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

sional reference to the coming events. He had many times before told his disciples that he would be betrayed, condemned, mocked, scourged and finally crucified, but they were so enthralled by the Messianic hope that they failed to grasp the import of his words. They still believed that the kingdom he alluded to would be an earthly kingdom, and was now about to be realized.

The caravan neared the city of Jericho. Here they were obliged to rest for a while, and the pilgrims thronged about him as he taught them and healed their sick. It was while sojourning here that he became a guest in the home of Zacchæus, chief of the publicans. This greatly enraged his followers, and they openly expressed their displeasure. They thought it an act unbecoming a king to bestow such honor upon one whom they

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despised. After relating the parable of the pounds, in which he again tried to make them understand that he was not to become their political ruler and reiterated that he was soon to depart from this world, he left them in deep meditation and resumed his journey alone at the head of the long procession of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem.

XV

THE SUPPER AT SIMON'S HOUSE

Nor far from the great city was the village of Bethany where they arrived on the evening of Friday, March 31, A. D. 33. Here he again parted from the procession and went to the home of Simon, whom he had cleansed of leprosy. Among the company gathered here were Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and many others whom he had blessed. On the evening of the next day, it being the Jewish Sabbath, a supper was given in his honor. Happy and peaceful as this occasion must have been, it marks the beginning of those overt acts which resulted in the crucifixion.

XVI

JUDAS BARGAINS WITH THE PRIESTS

JUDAS, the betrayer, was present at this supper, and after being severely rebuked by his Master for protesting against what he pretended was a lavish use of a precious ointment, he slunk away from the supper table and made his way to Jerusalem, and to the palace of the chief priest. Appearing before the council of the high priests there assembled he said to them that he had come to betray Jesus of Nazareth. "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?"

A bargain was soon made to pay the

JUDAS BARGAINS WITH PRIESTS

traitor thirty pieces of silver for his part in the diabolical plot to put Jesus to death. The blood money was then paid, but there was no time fixed or plan decided upon for action. Many motives have been suggested for this infamous transaction, but as no man betrays another without hating him, it was more than probable that the stinging reproof administered at the supper table aroused his anger to the point of revenge. Jesus, who saw into the hearts of all men, knew better than any one else the secret of the betrayal. He knew the part Judas was to play in the great tragedy long before the event took place. He knew Judas to be an irreparable criminal at heart when he selected him as one of the twelve, yet his treatment of him up to the very last was no different from his treatment of the others. Even after the treachery was

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consummated he addressed the traitor as "friend." He knew Judas must needs do what he did and he did not curse him. The mystery of the betrayal is enshrouded in the mystery of the redemption, and its solution is beyond mortal capability.

XVII

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

It was now holy week, and the city was thronged with pilgrims, many of whom had accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah and were now looking forward to his arrival in the city with intense interest. His enemies now more than feared that to execute their original fiat would cause "an uproar among the people."

On Sunday morning following the supper at Simon's house, Jesus set out on foot over the main road leading into Jerusalem. He had not proceeded far when his followers lifted him upon the colt of

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an ass, and led it forth to meet the streams of people that went out from the city to meet the approaching prophet. He evidently chose this animal as symbolical of meekness and humility, and to impress his countrymen that he came as a herald of peace and good will.

All are familiar with the Gospel account of the joy of the multitude as it advanced shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David," and "Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord." As they approached the gate of the city, shouting hosannas and waving palms, the Pharisees became alarmed and called to Jesus to quell the noise. Arriving at the gate the crowd dispersed and Jesus entered, going directly to the temple.

Having cleansed this place three years before, he found it again usurped by filthy traffickers. He again proceeded to drive

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

them out, and when the miserable hum and hubbub of the traders had been silenced, he began to heal and teach the people. His enemies looked on in wonder and despicable desperation. They made numerous attempts to annoy him on that memorable day. But it was a day of triumph for him and of humiliation for his enemies, and when the shadows of evening came he cautiously withdrew from the city and took refuge for the night in an olive grove near the town of Bethany.

XVIII

JESUS QUESTIONED BY HIS ENEMIES

EARLY the next morning Jesus and his disciples returned to the city and went again to the temple. The traders were now located on the outside, the inside of the building being filled with excited people. Scarcely had he entered the holy place on this Monday morning when he was met by a deputation of high priests, scribes, learned rabbis, and leading representatives of the Sanhedrin. Their purpose was to overawe him by a display of learning and pomposity.

In a spirit of abrupt hostility they de-

JESUS QUESTIONED BY ENEMIES

manded of him, "By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?" He answered them by asking the question. "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" They evaded his question by saying, "We cannot tell." To this Jesus replied, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." Then he related parable after parable that struck terror to the hearts of these pompous representatives of the Jewish heresiarchy, and so greatly aroused their envy and alarm that they would have seized him that very hour but for their fear of the crowd. However, they permitted him to retire to his resting-place in the grove without further molestation.

XIX

A NEW DEPUTATION SENT TO JESUS

THE enemies of Jesus held another consultation that night and decided to make one more effort "to entangle him in his talk." Early on Tuesday morning Jesus and his disciples returned to the city and entered the temple for the last time. He was now to encounter a new kind of strategy decided upon in the council during the night. At that meeting an alliance was formed between the Pharisees and Sadducees and their old-time enemies, the Herodians, and the new deputation sent to annoy Jesus was composed of the de-

A NEW DEPUTATION

votees of theocratic zeal and of crafty expediency. It was thought the Herodians would not excite suspicion of sinister motives. The priests and prominent Pharisees scrupulously absented themselves, but sent in their stead some of the offshoots in their school of hypocrisy.

The plan was to approach Jesus in a spirit of guileless inquiry. One of these said to him, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thouregardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?" Now if he said "no" the Herodians were to accuse him before Pilate with treason, and if he answered in the affirmative the Pharisees were to denounce him to the people as an enemy to their liberties. This nefarious design was frustrated by

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the wisdom of his reply. "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." He thus pointed out the inconsistency of denying honor and support to one whom they all recognized as their lawful sovereign.

Failing in their attempt thus to extort from him an admission that might convict him of a political offense, they next sought to render him obnoxious to one or the other of the sects who were divided on the doctrine of the resurrection; the Pharisees affirming and the Sadducees denying that the dead would rise again. Speaking of a certain widow who had recently died, and who had previously been married seven times, they said to Jesus, "In the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?" He replied by explaining their own laws that in Heaven the relation of

A NEW DEPUTATION

husband and wife did not exist. A certain lawyer next thought to further test the learning and wisdom of Jesus, and, if possible, entrap him into saying that one commandment in the law was greater than another. "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?" was the question propounded. His reply was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This reply is inclusive of all commandments, and is regarded as the most sublime utterance of his life. This was their last attempt to entangle him, and like all the rest, resulted in signal defeat. He had humiliated their much vaunted wisdom so effectually that they were only too willing to cease questioning him. But

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he was not through with them. To further expose the fallacy of their interpretations and to rebuke their refinements and sophistries, he put to them the question. "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" They had taught that the promised Messiah would be the son of David, and the successor to the throne, so they answered by saying, "The son of David;" meaning thereby David's son by human birth. By his reply Jesus showed them to be "blind leaders of the blind." He said. "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord saith unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" By this spiritual interpretation of the Psalm he showed clearly that the "son" referred to would be divine, not human; that the "Lord" mentioned by

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David as "my Lord" was spiritually the son of God.

Having rejected Jesus as their Messiah, they pretended not to grasp the import of his simple explanation. Directing his words now to his disciples and to the multitude, he advised them to respect the Pharisees and Sadducees so far as they represented a legitimate or external authority, but warned them against imitating their vices.

XX

DENUNCIATION OF HIS ENEMIES

AT THIS juncture he turned upon his enemies, and with the fire of righteous indignation flashing from his eyes he said, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." It was his opportunity to tell them publicly of their sins and shortcomings. He proceeded to reprimand them most severely. He denounced their corruption, and charged them with enslaving the people by their traditions. He unmasked their hypocrisy, exposed their false pride, denounced their insatiable greed, and condemned their spirit of

DENUNCIATION OF HIS ENEMIES

'domination. It was now evident that his denunciation had precipitated a final and hopeless rupture. Speaking to his disciples he said, "Let us depart hence," and with sad heart and downcast eyes he walked out of the temple never to return. Sadly and silently the little band turned their backs on the sacred building, passed out of the gate of the great city, and made their way up the steep path leading to the top of the Mount of Olives. Here they rested and discoursed about the coming events. After sunset they journeyed on to Bethany, where he was again entertained in the house of Simon. The Gospels do not inform us regarding his movements on Wednesday, the next day, but he evidently remained with his friends in Bethany until Thursday afternoon.

XXI

ANOTHER CONSULTATION

THE scathing denunciation administered by Jesus in the temple on Tuesday greatly augmented the envy and hatred of his enemies. That very night they held another consultation. Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, priests, scribes, elders, were all aroused, and their own differences were forgotten in a conspiracy to destroy their common enemy. The record does not disclose the particulars of this meeting, but we gather from it that they emphatically and decisively renewed their former conclusion that Jesus must, at all hazards, be put to death without delay, but that it must be done by subtlety, and

ANOTHER CONSULTATION

not by violence, lest there might be an uprising among the people. To obviate this danger they thought to postpone the deed until the feast was ended and the multitude had left the city. While in the very act of making this decision, a messenger announced the arrival of Judas. It will be remembered that the traitor had appeared at a previous meeting of the council and agreed to betray his Master for an insignificant money consideration. Whether his errand now was to obtain more money, or to inform his co-conspirators of the whereabouts of his Master, we are not informed, but the fact that he was still willing to deliver Jesus into the hands of these sanctimonious murderers evidently strengthened them in their heinous purpose and caused them to decide to have the betrayal take place at a time when Jesus was practically alone.

XXII

THE LAST SUPPER

DOUBTLESS there was great disappointment and conjecture when Jesus did not appear in the city on Wednesday. The multitude waited for him with intense expectation. The conspirators looked for him with sinister hope, but he did not come. On the evening of Thursday, the next day, the great annual Passover was commenced by the Paschal feast. Jesus might have eaten this meal in Bethany, but he chose rather to go into the city. He accordingly sent Peter and John in advance to make arrangements for the supper. He directed them to go to the

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house of a certain friend and follower where they would find an upper chamber suitably furnished for the occasion. They found everything as he had told them, and they made preparations for the meal.

Late that afternoon Jesus and the rest of the disciples left Bethany by way of the old familiar path over the Mount of Olives and wended their way to the city. Whether there was any attempt to elude his enemies in getting into the city we are not informed, but it seems like a miracle that he could pass through that vast throng with his little band of followers and not be noticed. Arriving at the house of his friend, they went to the upper room where they found the table spread and the meal ready. All are familiar with the Gospel narratives of what took place in this room on the eve of the world's most momentous tragedy. Jesus knew that the

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hour for his agony and ultimate glorification was close at hand, but he wished once more to dip his bread in the same dish with his disciples.

The disciples now seemed to realize that some great calamity was approaching—that their Master was about to meet some horrible fate—and when he told them that one of their number would betray him into the hands of his enemies their hearts were filled with sad misgivings. They were deeply troubled and began to question among themselves who the traitor might be. Judas alone was silent and sullen. Turning toward him Jesus said, “That thou doest, do quickly.” Judas made no reply, but arose from the table and left the room. His departure seemed to lift a great weight from that blessed company, and they spent the remainder of the evening listening to the farewell discourse of

THE LAST SUPPER

their Master. He discussed his mission on earth and told them that it was about to be fulfilled. He explained to them how he was soon to be delivered into the hands of his enemies to be crucified. Horrified and grief-stricken, they sat mute and sorrowful while he disclosed the plot that was so soon to tear him from them and from the admiring multitude and cast him into an abyss of human degradation and woe, apparently deserted of God and man. But the words of comfort which he spoke to them on that sad occasion stand alone among all utterances for the union of tenderness and majesty. His own sorrows are forgotten in his solicitude to speak peace and comfort to his sorrow-stricken followers. They knew that he loved them, but until now their bruised hearts had not felt that his love for them was greater than for his own life.

XXIII

THE AGONY OF GETHSEMANE

AFTER the services at the supper table were concluded Jesus and his disciples started on their moonlight journey to the Mount of Olives. On the Mount there was a garden or grove of olives which was called Gethsemane, and was located about half a mile from the wall of the city. He would have been a welcome and an honored guest in many a home in the city, but he preferred the quiet of that sacred grove in order that he might commune alone with his Father in Heaven. He knew that the awful hour of his deepest humiliation was at hand, and he must now

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brace his body and calm his spirit by prayer in order to meet the physical pain and mental anguish he would have to undergo. Arriving at the spot where they had planned to spend the night, he took Peter, James and John with him about a stone's throw from the rest. Realizing that he must face the agony alone, he said to the three, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death; tarry ye here, and watch." Withdrawing from them a little distance, he fell upon his face, and there, alone, in the dead hour of night, he suffered that unutterable agony. Before slumber overtook them the three watchers caught indistinct sounds of the agonizing voice of their Master as his humanity pleaded for the bitter cup to pass from him. They distinctly heard him utter, in tones of heartrending pathos, that memorable entreaty, "Abba, Father, all things

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are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me." Was it fear of impending death that prompted this appeal? He could now have escaped by fleeing from the country, but the fact that he did not shows that he did not wish to escape death and the horrors that were to accompany it. No one will ever know the true meaning of the words he uttered in that lonely grove. It was something infinitely more than fear that prompted his appeal and forced out the sweat of blood. The heavy burden of the world's sin lay upon his soul. That those whom he loved were soon to forsake and deny him filled his bosom with unspeakable woe. That his own people should array themselves against the pure and innocent stirred the very depths of his being. But from that hour of soul agony he emerged victorious and ready to

THE AGONY OF GETHSEMANE

meet his cruel fate. He was willing to leave all to his Father, even though it meant for him a journey over the rugged road from Gethsemane to Calvary.

XXIV

THE ARREST

APPROACHING the three disciples, he found them fast asleep. They had failed to watch with him. The "spirit was willing but the flesh was weak." Hearing the noise of the mob and seeing their lights approaching, he said to his sleeping followers: "Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." It was now near midnight. Judas had warned the priests that the opportune time had arrived for the seizure of their victim, and they hastily gathered together a band of ruffians and despatched them with the betrayer to the Mount of Olives.

THE ARREST

The motley band was composed of the servants of the high priests, the watchmen of the temple, and Roman soldiers. As they noisily moved up the hill, armed with swords and staves, they presented every appearance of a mob.

But why make so much noise and display in arresting a man whom they knew would not offer resistance or attempt to escape? Their purpose in this was to impress the people with the idea that Jesus had committed some heinous crime that demanded immediate and swift punishment. Their purpose was to destroy his reputation, and, if possible, render him so vile in the public estimation that his destruction would be regarded with complacency.

As the noisy mob rushed up, Judas pressed to the front and profaned the sacred cheek of his Master with a kiss.

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This was the preconcerted signal of identification. "Whomsoever I shall kiss," he had instructed the rabble, "that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely." This hypocritical salutation must have been prematurely given, for Jesus was not immediately seized. He stepped forward and demanded, "Whom seek ye?" The foremost replied, "Jesus of Nazareth." With that calmness and composure that characterized him on all occasions, he quietly said to them, "I am he." They were startled at his frankness and filled with fear by his calm bearing and fearless demeanor. They were so amazed and paralyzed by his gentle answer that many of them fell prostrate at his feet. The hardened among them seized him and began to bind him. Fearing violence was about to be inflicted upon their Master, the disciples prepared to repel force by

THE ARREST

force. The impetuous Peter, being the only one having a sword, drew it and cut off the ear of the insolent Malchus. For this he was severely rebuked by his Master. "Put up again thy sword into his place:" he said, "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Then, as a last act of miraculous mercy, he reached forth and touched the wound of Malchus and it was healed. Personally Jesus made no resistance whatever, but permitted himself to be bound and led away. His disciples were amazed and bewildered to think that one with such power would suffer himself to be made a prisoner. They began to lose confidence in him and thought they had been following a deceiver. And when they saw him securely in the hands of his enemies, they abandoned him and took to flight. Truly he had said to them, "Behold, the hour

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cometh, . . . that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone." Peter and John, however, fled no farther than safety demanded and followed the infamous procession from a safe distance. They appeared later in the courtyard at Caiaphas' house.

XXV

QUESTIONED BY ANNAS

JESUS was bound as a thief and a malefactor and dragged into the city. Instead of putting him "in ward until the morrow," as required by law in case of a night arrest, they hurried him off to the house of old man Annas for an illegal midnight examination. Annas, son of Seth, had formerly held the office of high priest for seven years, and was still the real primate of the Jewish church, but at this particular time he had no judicial or administrative authority whatever. During the period of twenty years since he had been deposed, the office of high priest

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had been occupied mainly by some member of his family, and was now held by his son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas. Although now of advanced age, this ex-high priest practically wielded sacerdotal power, and was active, astute and tyrannous. He was the nominal head of the pontifical clique that had grown wealthy and powerful by their infamous system of temple tribute. Jesus' act of cleansing the temple had seriously interfered with this source of revenue, and the old man was now determined, at all hazards, to trump up some available charge against him.

It must be remembered that under the Jewish law a criminal investigation could not be conducted by a sole judicial officer. The law recognized no such star-chamber examination even by a duly qualified and acting magistrate, much less one conducted by a private citizen. St. John

QUESTIONED BY ANNAS

tells us that Annas "asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine." He made no attempt to elicit specific acts committed. He wished to ascertain first of all who were the followers of Jesus, and to what rank of society they belonged, so that he might determine to what extent the new doctrine had progressed.

Jesus made no answer to the first part of the question, but his answer relative to his doctrine was a challenge to produce witnesses in support of any charge they might choose to make against him personally. He said, "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret I have said nothing. Why asketh thou me? Ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said."

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In this statement he not only told the truth about his frank and open conduct, but hinted indirectly to the clandestine meetings they had conducted and the dark conspiracy they had secretly formed to put him to death. This must have nettled the old man and caused a scowl to come over his face, for one of the officers of the guard dealt Jesus a blow in the face, at the same time insolently saying, "Answerest thou the high priest so?"

This blow was the beginning of the insults that were to be heaped upon him until his death. That this illegal act of violence was sanctioned by Annas is shown by his failure to reprimand the officer. Under the law such a brutal act would have been inexcusable even against a prisoner finally condemned to death. Turning to the rogue who had struck him, Jesus said, "If I have spoken evil, bear

QUESTIONED BY ANNAS

witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" This terminated the illegal and unwarranted examination before the ex-high priest; whereupon Jesus was bound in a manner to indicate he was to be condemned, and hurried across the courtyard to that part of the palace occupied by his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the high priest.

XXVI

PETER'S DENIAL

PETER and John, being unable to leave one whom they held so dear, followed the arresting party in the safe darkness of the night, and when they arrived at the palace the two disciples entered the courtyard. As Peter passed through the door the female doorkeeper recognized him and said, "Art not thou also one of his disciples?" Assuming an offended air Peter replied, "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest." His heated denial aroused the men and they looked at him more closely. One of them said, "Surely thou art one of them; for thou art a Galilean,

PETER'S DENIAL

and thy speech agreeth thereto." At this the disciple protested louder than ever and began to curse and swear, saying that they had mistaken him for another.

At this very moment Jesus was being led across the courtyard, and on hearing the denials and oaths he turned his eyes upon the disciple for a moment. It was enough. Like an arrow through his inmost soul shot the mute but eloquent anguish of that reproachful glance. One look from those gentle eyes was more unendurable than any contempt. It pierced the distracted heart of the fisherman as no words of reproach could have done. Flinging the folds of his mantle over his head, he rushed from the awful scene, leaving his master defenseless and alone.

XXVII

FIRST HEARING BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

JESUS was taken into the judgment hall of the high priest where his trial was to be held. Here the chief priests, elders and scribes had been waiting all night in anticipation of the unauthorized arrest. These officials constituted the personnel of the central council of the high court of the Sanhedrin. They were now awaiting the call from the high priest to assemble. The record does not inform us of the number of these officials present on this occasion, nor does it disclose the names of those who participated in the disgraceful proceedings, but it is fair to assume that

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there was a quorum and that they were mainly of the priestly clique. It is certain that every one of them, Caiaphas included, were disqualified under the law from sitting as judges in this case on account of their activities in the conspiracy to put Jesus to death. If this were not the case, why were they here holding a midnight session of the court in violation of law? It was in furtherance of that conspiracy that they now assembled.

Remember, it was still night, probably soon after midnight, for the cock had already crowed and Peter had thrice denied his Master. The members of that once august tribunal, but now a dubious and hybrid sort of assembly, finally arranged themselves in a semicircle on the rostrum. Jesus stood before them, bound and defenseless, but with a composure that was calm, serene and fearless. He faced the

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group of conspirators that had come together to ratify with a cloak of legality the decree of murder already written in their hearts. There was no one present to defend him. His friends, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, both members of the Sanhedrin, were absent, either because they feared to defend him openly, or because they refused to participate in an illegal transaction such as was now taking place. Under the law of practise and procedure in this tribunal, the first step was the arraignment of the prisoner. This consisted of reading the charges in open court by an official known as the auditor or candidate, and corresponding to our clerk. The charges were based on an accusation previously made before the proper tribunal. The record in this case is silent on the matter of arraignment.

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There could be no arraignment without an accusation as a basis therefor. That there was no formal accusation or arraignment in this case is conclusively shown by the statement that they "sought for witnesses against Jesus to put him to death; and found none." This false witness they were seeking was not a witness to testify against him, but an accuser who would prefer charges against him, for in the next sentence we find "though many false witnesses came." There was present among that rabble every element of vice and crime, ready and willing to perjure their souls for hire, but no one could be found willing to assume the dire consequences of a false accusation.

The various factions and sects were now represented in this assembly, and great precaution must be exercised not to stir up latent animosities existing among

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them. They must brand him with some crime upon which they could all agree, and it was decided that this must be of a public nature. The record says, "At the last came two false witnesses." These witnesses had heard Jesus say something about destroying the temple. They gave a garbled statement to the effect that they had heard him say he would destroy it and rebuild it in three days. Now if their testimony related to the same occasion on which he was supposed to have made the threat, there was a fatal disagreement. On the other hand if their testimony was confined to separate occasions when Jesus said the same thing, they did not agree together and testify to one and the same offense, as the law required. One witness stated that Jesus said "I can destroy this temple," and the other swore that he said "I will destroy this temple." As a matter

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of fact he did not use either of these expressions, but what he did say was "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," and his reference was not to the Jewish temple but to the temple of his body. The record further states "But neither so did their witnesses agree together." In the absence of such agreement their statements proved nothing.

But the high priest seems to have regarded their testimony as conclusive, for he now called upon Jesus to offer his defense. "And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answereth thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?" But it was a travesty upon justice to require Jesus to make a defense without giving him time and opportunity to prepare it, and to the call thus made Jesus made no response. The prosecution had rested but

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had utterly failed to make out a case, so Jesus was now entitled to be acquitted without being questioned respecting the testimony offered against him. If a case had been made against him, why question him further? Why further violate the law by compelling him to testify against himself? The silence of the prisoner greatly exasperated the high priest, and, instead of defending the accused, as was his duty under the law, he now assumed the office of an accuser, in utter violation of all precedent and propriety. The accusation he was now about to make involved an entirely different matter than that to which the testimony adduced related. In defiance of the positive rule of procedure that forbade any member of the court to become an accuser, the high priest sprang to his feet and shouted, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou

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tell us whether thou be the Christ, the son of God?" He not only had no legal right to ask this question, but Jesus could not be required to answer it for the reason that it might tend to criminate him. But Jesus could not deny himself to the living God. The question concerned his Messiahship and he could not be silent. After hesitating a moment he said, "If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me." This excited the whole assembly, and they sprang to their feet and cried out "Art thou then the son of God?" Knowing the consequence of his avowal, knowing that it meant death for him, yet he courageously replied, "Thou hast said."

At last they had succeeded in obtaining from him a confession, which, in their blindness, they regarded as highly blasphemous. The high priest lost no time

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in announcing his individual opinion, and the opinions of the other members of the court were forthcoming. With a display of mingled pleasure and hatred, the high priest announced the judgment of conviction by saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?" So saying the priest rent his judicial robe in token of his horror and detestation of blasphemy. Seeing this and knowing that it signified that Jesus had been found guilty of the horrible crime of blasphemy, the crowd shouted, "He is guilty of death." The tide of indignation immediately turned against him whose name so recently had been the theme of their loudest hosannas. His enemies had now succeeded in making him odious to the people, and there was now no need to fear a public uprising. He had condemned himself of blasphemy out of his own mouth.

XXVIII

THE CRIME OF BLASPHEMY

BUT let us see if the acknowledgment of Jesus that he was the Christ was blasphemous, or if the mere admission that he was the Messiah was alone sufficient to warrant a judgment of conviction. We have seen that under the Jewish law no person could be convicted of a capital offense upon his voluntary confession. If the words of Jesus on this occasion were in themselves blasphemous, as the court evidently concluded they were, then no other witnesses were necessary; but if the crime consisted in the falsity of his assertion that he was the Christ, he could not

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be legally convicted until his assertion was proved to be untrue. If his innocence or guilt depended upon the truth or falsity of his statement, he should have been given an opportunity to prove the truth of his claim. Caiaphas' words, "He hath spoken blasphemy," show that they regarded his utterance as the gist of the crime.

The crime of blasphemy, as it was understood among the Jews, consisted in the use of the name of God in an impious, idle, light or flippant manner, and in usurping to one's self power and authority belonging to God alone. It extended to every word and act directly detracting from his sovereignty, such as speaking in the name of some other god, or neglecting, on occasions requiring it, to give honor and credit due His holy name. The law provided that no other Deity could be in-

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voked, and no miracle wrought except in the name of God alone.

The prosecution had not produced one single scintilla of evidence to show that Jesus had claimed power or authority apart from God; that he had ever impiously or irreverently used the name of the Supreme Being, or had claimed for himself superhuman power without an express acknowledgment of God as its author. He had wrought many miracles, but always disclaimed that his works were of a supernatural order. He frankly admitted that the power was of God. That he attributed them to no power of his own is shown by his statement, "I can of mine own self do nothing . . . but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works." Moreover, he did not claim to possess any advantage over others in this respect, for he said, "He that believeth on me, the

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works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father." He recognized God as the savior of the body as well as the soul. On all occasions he acknowledged the omnipotence of the one and only Creator, whom he affectionately called the "Father." In that immortal discourse, known as the "Sermon on the Mount," he taught the multitude, in that brief and perfect petition, how to approach the "Father" in prayer. On another occasion he said, "No man can come to me, except the Father . . . draw him." On still another he said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman." And again, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." And "My Father is greater than I." Also, "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name he may give it

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you.” On still another occasion he said, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in Heaven.” And, “As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.” In that agonizing prayer in the garden of Gethsemane he uttered the pathetic appeal, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” Even in the throes of death on the cross, as the last dark billows rolled over his soul, he exclaimed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Thus we see that at all times and on all occasions he recognized the omnipotence of the Universal Father.

Mr. Greenleaf, whom Mr. S. Srinivasa Aiyar cites in support of his contention for the legality of this trial, makes the following observation: “He had per-

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formed many miracles, but never in any other name than his own. In his own name, and without the recognition of any higher power, he had miraculously healed the sick," etc. It is difficult to conceive how any one who has read the record could give publicity to such an absurdity. Take that crowning miracle of the raising of Lazarus. The record says, "And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. . . . And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!" This event shows that he invoked the power of the "Father" to bring his friend back to life. He had just said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" This was a clear demonstration and acknowledgment not of his own power but the power of God.

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The Jews had been looking forward with impatient expectation to the coming of the Messiah prophesied and promised by their own sacred Scriptures. How were they to recognize him when he did appear except by concordant characteristics and attributes? The lonely figure that now stood before the Sanhedrin possessed characteristics and attributes that harmonized perfectly with the Scriptural representation of the promised one.

Long centuries before his birth, the prophet Isaiah said of his coming: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Every incident of his life was in perfect accord with this prophecy. He lived the gentle life; not a life of cringing submission to wrong, for no man ever re-

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vealed so lofty a spirit as he. On more than one occasion he spoke with no uncertain sound against the hypocritical pretenders of his time, but his message as a whole was not one of denunciation, but blessing. By his marvelous works, and especially the raising of Lazarus, he displayed attributes which the Jews recognized as possessed by the Messiah alone.

These convincing proofs of his Messianic requisites were available to the court, but in utter disregard of them, it decided that his mere avowal in answer to their question "Art thou the Christ, the son of God" was within itself blasphemous. Without attempting to show that he was an impostor, or giving him an opportunity to prove the truth of his claim, they adjudged him guilty of a capital offense. The Hebrew conception of the Messiah was based on the descrip-

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tion given of him in the Scriptures, which was that he would be the divinely anointed prophet, priest and king, the son of God, not God himself. Hence Jesus' acknowledgment that he was "the Christ, the son of God," was not claiming that he was God. Neither was his assertion a claim that he was another god. If he had claimed to be the Supreme Being or a God separate and apart from the one God, such claim would clearly have been blasphemous, but he made no such claim.

XXIX

DUAL NATURE OF TRIAL

THE first hearing before the Sanhedrin, in which Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy, was concluded about three o'clock on the morning of Friday, the great festal day. The court adjourned until daybreak to take final council against him to put him to death. We have seen that the law required a dual trial in capital cases, and that a sentence of death could not be pronounced at the first trial, but only upon a second hearing and a second vote resulting the same as the first. This second hearing could be legally held only after one full day had intervened, during which in-

DUAL NATURE OF TRIAL

terval the members of the court were to abstain from doing anything that might render their minds less capable of reflection. In order to have made the final judgment legal, they should have held the second trial on a separate day from the day on which the first was held, but the next day was their Sabbath on which no trial could be legally conducted. In their impetuous haste to put Jesus to death, they thought to hold the first trial on the night of the arrest in order that they might, with some pretense of regularity, conduct the second trial on Friday.

It must be remembered that at the first hearing before the Sanhedrin a sentence of death could not be legally pronounced. The verdict found on the first hearing was not to be final, but another hearing must be given the accused on a subsequent day, allowing one day to intervene between the

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two trials for the judges to reflect on the case. Those voting for conviction at the first hearing were permitted to vote for an acquittal at the second hearing. Therefore, the accused might be acquitted at the second hearing if a sufficient number of the judges changed their votes so that the total vote for conviction lacked the required majority.

The Sanhedrin had already voted to convict Jesus, but this was not to be final. The presumption of innocence continued until the pronouncement of a sentence of death at the conclusion of the second hearing. Jesus had not yet been legally and finally sentenced. His life was still in the hands of the court, and it was bound to throw around him all the protection of the law.

XXX

VIOLENCE AND INSULTS

BUT let us see what protection was given him by the court during the interval between these two trials. From the moment that Caiaphas announced the verdict of guilty on the first hearing Jesus was regarded as a fit person to be insulted with impunity. He was turned over to the guards who dragged him into the courtyard of the palace where he was surrounded by a shouting and insulting crowd that mocked and reviled him in a manner abhorrent to the law. They spat in his face, blindfolded him, beat him, and mockingly exclaimed, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?"

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Luke says, "And many other things blasphemously spake they against him." The servile pack that lived upon the leavings of the temple felt that they deserved some amusement. Jesus staggered under the rain of blows, but uttered not a word of complaint. He displayed great physical fortitude in going through such a cruel ordeal. He could now have defended himself as effectually as he cleared the money-changers out of the temple, but he graciously accepted it all as the will of his Father. He was not a martyr in the sense that he was willing to undergo this ordeal of torment and death for an opinion, but he believed himself to be the Christ, a divine personage, and would presently rise again in glory. He did not fear that error could prevail over truth. This was the secret of his poise throughout his great passion.

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Finally, he was remanded to the guard-house to await the break of day. Here the foul acts of violence and insults were renewed with increased fury, for they now smote him with rods and struck him with their closed fists. The cruel and inhuman treatment of Jesus during the dark hours of the first decision was a flagrant violation of the spirit of the Jewish law. Such acts of violence would be inexcusable even against a man finally condemned to death, much less against one who had not been legally sentenced. The members of the Sanhedrin were present and witnessed these outrages but made no effort to stop it. To permit such outrages was not only a violation of a duty imposed upon them by law, but was wholly foreign to the dignity of the highest court of the nation.

XXXI

SECOND HEARING BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

THUS Jesus passed the wretched hours until the dawn of that memorable Friday, the day of the feast of unleavened bread. It was also the day before the Jewish Sabbath. We have seen that to hold a session of the Sanhedrin for the trial of a criminal case on this day was positively forbidden by law. But the judges of that court had already violated the law by holding a night session, so why be scrupulous about the law at this stage of the proceeding? So, immediately after the morning sacrifice, probably about six o'clock, Jesus was

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dragged into the hall of the temple where the judges had assembled for the second and final hearing. The record says, "And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council."

Here were the elders whose hypocrisy Jesus had unmasked, the priests whose greed and selfishness he had denounced, and the scribes whose ignorance he had exposed. Each and all now had an interest in and were inexorably bent upon his death, and for this reason were disqualified under the law to sit in judgment upon him. They had all been in a conspiracy to put him to death, and were now resolved upon accomplishing their preconceived design, even by the flimsiest pretext of complying with the law.

It is altogether probable that a larger

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number of judges participated in this second hearing than was present at the night session. If so, these additional members were entitled to hear some evidence on which to found their vote. Besides, the law provided that the same formalities were now required as were required at the former hearing, and the accused was required to be afforded the same protection as should have been granted him at the first hearing.

But this morning session was simply to be a perfunctory affair, evidently arranged to cure a patent defect of conducting a night session. No witnesses were examined at this morning trial, but the court again violated the law by requiring Jesus to testify against himself. In response to a repetition of their question "Art thou then the Son of God?" he answered by saying, "Ye say that I am.

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Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God." When he had thus spoken the whole assembly cried out, as Caiaphas had done before, "What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard from his own mouth."

Thus Jesus was again convicted of blasphemy on his naked statement without any attempt to disprove his assertion or permit him to substantiate it. They again brushed aside the formality of removing the spectators and registering the votes. This final judgment was followed by another and more brutal display of violence, in which the members of the court participated.

Judas was now present, and seeing that his Master was finally condemned to die, began to realize what he had done. In his maddening remorse he cried out, "I

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have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Flinging his paltry thirty pieces of silver to the floor he fled into the despairing solitude and hanged himself. He felt impelled to give back the payment for the betrayal before disappearing in death. He was only one victim sacrificed to the curse of money.

According to the public law of the country, as we shall soon see, this final judgment of the Sanhedrin did not constitute a sentence of death, and the outrages here committed were as flagrantly illegal as those committed on former occasions. I deem it unnecessary to sum up the many irregularities and illegal steps taken, from the very inception to the conclusion of this disgraceful affair. The careful reader will not fail to see them and to be impressed with their enormity. Even those who contend for the legality of sub-

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sequent proceedings before the Roman authorities admit that the Jewish trial was a farce. In speaking of the proceedings before the Sanhedrin, Doctor Aiyar, in his treatise on *The Legality of the Trial of Jesus* frankly says: "It was more in the nature of a farcical examination in which the sentiment of the people, those of the sons of Israel who prosecuted him, were unable to maintain." In his *Martyrdom of Jesus*, Rabbi Wise says: "If none of the judges defended the culprit, the verdict was invalid." This is a correct statement of the law. Doctor Aiyar further says: "The judges who had to pass upon the case were the defenders."

These and other writers assert that Jesus was defended in his trial before the Sanhedrin by his friends Gamaliel and Rabbi Narada. Tagore says: "Before this is done a fervent appeal for the ac-

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cused is made by two members of the court. Gamaliel, the Ancient, presents every doubt for Jesus that can be taken advantage of. He was followed by Rabbi Narada, of the chamber of elders. He refuted the charge that the accused had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and against God. It was of no avail. All the members of the chamber save those two who spoke for the accused voted for conviction." This statement is a direct contradiction of the record which says, "And they all condemned him to be guilty of death." The statement quoted from Tagore would seem to be purely imaginary, for there is not a word in the record about a defense having been made by any one. If these two judges had defended Jesus, as it is claimed, it would have been their duty under the law to have voted to acquit, but the record shows a unanimous verdict of guilty.

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Judging from the way they silenced Nicodemus on a former occasion when he attempted to speak in behalf of Jesus, it would have been suicide for any one to have attempted a defense. Nicodemus, that noble prince of the Jews and member of the Sanhedrin, was not present at this trial, and it is fair to assume that Gamaliel, the worthy Israelite and upright lawyer, did not participate in a proceeding of the character of the one under discussion.

XXXII

AUTHORITY TO EXECUTE THE DEATH SENTENCE

ASSUMING that the Sanhedrin had jurisdiction, at this particular time, of offenses punishable by death, their next step would have been to execute the sentence by stoning Jesus to death. But at this time, authority to pronounce and execute the death sentence had been taken away from the Jews by conquest and conferred upon the Roman government. The Jewish courts were left free to regulate their own civil and religious affairs according to their own laws, but they had no jurisdiction of offenses involving the

AUTHORITY

lives or liberties of any citizen. The Sanhedrin had no power or authority whatever to pronounce a sentence of death against Jesus under the circumstances as they now existed. The extent of its authority consisted in making an accusation before the Roman magistrate, who alone had power to hear and determine a criminal accusation so made. By brushing aside every known precedent and violating every principle of established law, the court had arrived at a verdict of conviction and pronounced a sentence it had no legal right to pronounce nor to execute. But the proceedings, although a farce, had accomplished the aim and purpose of the enemies of Jesus. It had the effect to destroy his reputation and to turn the tide of popular indignation against him. They could now go before the Roman authorities backed by an over-

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whelming sentiment against their victim. They had succeeded in inciting public clamor for his destruction by appealing to the religious bigotry of the individual.

XXXIII

THE ROMAN FORM OF PROCEDURE

THE record says, "And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate." This consultation must have been held immediately following the court's pronouncement of the death sentence, and on the feast day. The council evidently decided that inasmuch as their execution of the sentence would be in violation of law, it might involve them in serious complications with the Roman

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authorities. Besides, whatever odium that might result from the execution by the Romans would be charged up to the Romans.

Since Jesus must undergo a Roman trial, it is important that we understand something of the law of procedure applicable to the case before the Roman tribunal. During the imperial period of Rome, which lasted from 31 B. C. to A. D. 476, the active judicial authority was mainly vested in two great officers known as prætors. As new provinces were acquired, additional prætors were appointed for these provinces. These prætors were not judicial officers, but had general supervision over the judiciary of the several provinces.

Particular officers were appointed to administer the laws, and at the time of which we are speaking, Pontius Pilate was

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one of these officers, and his title was that of imperial procurator. To Pilate belonged the right of taking cognizance of capital cases at Jerusalem. His jurisdiction in such cases was not limited to the mere approval or confirmation of sentences passed by other tribunals, but he took cognizance of crimes, and, by reason of his plenary jurisdiction, must review the case from the beginning. He could not be made the mere passive instrument of the wishes of the Jews, but must inquire into the accusation made, and determine from all the facts and circumstances whether the prisoner be guilty of an offense punishable under the Roman law. From his judgment there was no appeal except to the emperor. If the case was one over which the Jewish court had jurisdiction it was incumbent upon the procurator to review the case as an appellate

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tribunal, and determine whether the trial court erred at any stage of the proceeding. But if the crime charged be one not recognized by the Roman law it became the duty of the procurator to refuse to proceed further with the case. Also if an accusation be made before him, he must take the prisoner apart and question him with a view of ascertaining if there is sufficient basis for a review of the proceedings already had, or for trying him originally.

XXXIV

THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

DURING the feast of the Passover Pilate left his headquarters in the temple of Augustus at Cæsarea and temporarily occupied the Herodian palace at Jerusalem. The architectural splendor of this building has been said to surpass all description. It stood upon a high elevation overlooking the great city. Outwardly it was adorned with sculptured porticos and many colored marble columns. Its interior walls were of jasper, inlaid with precious stones, representing every variety of fruit and flower in all their natural tints and varied forms of grace and beauty. The

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vast dome of its spacious chamber represented the deep blue heavens, studded with glittering constellations of starry gold. In the midst of this sublime spectacle there was now about to be enacted the most monstrous tragedy the world had ever witnessed. Here Jesus was to find a judge who was in his favor, one who of all was the least guilty of malice and hatred, one who possessed a sincere desire to save his life, but a man sadly lacking in moral courage, as we shall presently see.

Fearing they might defile themselves by entering the house of a heathen on the feast day, the priests remained on the outside. This was a singular manifestation of piety, coming as it did so soon after an outrage committed in contempt of their own laws. As they would not enter the hall "Pilate then went out unto them." In words appropriate to the opening of

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a case before a Roman magistrate, Pilate said to them, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" It will be observed that he did not ask them for the sentence they had pronounced as he would have done had he intended simply to give his sanction to the execution of the sentence, but he clearly indicated an intention to take the case up as a magistrate having plenary power to hear the matter from the beginning; to conduct a judicial inquiry; to try the case *de novo*. They were surprised and greatly chagrined at the sudden turn of events. They fully expected that this man of iron and blood would have taken keen delight in the sacrifice of their humble prisoner; but even a Roman judge dared not sentence a man to death without giving him a legal trial for an offense punishable by death under the Roman law.

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At first the priests sought to evade Pilate's question by saying "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee." This was as much as to say, "We have tried and condemned him, and it is not for you to say what he is guilty of but to give the order for his execution." They were shrewd enough to know that if they were to bring before Pilate the accusation of blasphemy he would ridicule the charge and turn their victim loose. Perceiving by their reply an attempt to restrict his jurisdiction by making him an instrument for carrying out their wishes, Pilate became indignant and said to them, "take ye him, and judge him according to your law."

In view of the fact that the Jews were without authority to condemn a person to death or to execute a sentence of death without Roman sanction, this reply of

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Pilate was genuine irony. They were now forced to admit their lack of power to execute their sentence. They said, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." They were now convinced that Pilate would refuse to take cognizance of any matter not pertaining to the laws of Rome.

XXXV

A NEW CHARGE

IN ORDER to accomplish their fiendish purpose, they saw that it would be necessary to present to Pilate an accusation involving a violation of the Roman law. At this juncture occurred the crisis, the one incident which alone brands the whole proceeding as the most damnable piece of treachery the world has ever witnessed. The priests now seemed to forget their religion, which they had decided Jesus had outraged, and sought to charge him with some political offense over which Pilate would assume jurisdiction. The hypocrites now pretended to be concerned for

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the interests of Rome, and changed their charge from blasphemy to treason against Cæsar. They thought by giving a political color to their accusation it would appeal to the procurator's loyalty to Rome. If they could convince Pilate that Jesus was guilty of inciting rebellion against constituted authority, he could not do less than put him to death. They said to Pilate, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying 'I am Christ the king.'"

The heart of man never conceived nor did human lips ever frame a more gigantic falsehood. It will be remembered that when the Pharisees attempted to entrap him into saying that it was unlawful to give tribute to Cæsar, Jesus, in the presence of the multitude, held up a Roman coin bearing the image of Cæsar and told them to give unto Cæsar the things that

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are Cæsar's. Was this forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar? Since the most important official duty of Pilate was to superintend the collection of the revenue, they thought this accusation would interest the procurator in respect to his jurisdiction.

The charge that he was holding himself up as a king still more directly affected the sovereignty of Rome. Since this accusation was of a political character, Pilate was bound to give it some attention. The record says, "Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the king of the Jews?" This was the preliminary examination conducted apart, as the law required, to ascertain if there was sufficient basis for holding the prisoner for trial. This being a charge altogether different from the one made before the Sanhedrin, and, desiring

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an acknowledgment of its origin, Jesus said to Pilate, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" To this Pilate replied, "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me; what hast thou done?"

Jesus saw from this explanation a plot to accuse him before Pilate of attempting to make himself king of the Jews. The plot was worthy of the high priests. They knew that the very thing that Pilate dared not face at Rome was an accusation that he was parleying with treason by permitting a usurper to cause trouble in the province. In defense of this accusation Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."

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This remarkable answer, given in defense of the accusation of attempting to make himself king of the Jews, became the foundation of his religion and the guarantee of its universal acceptance, for it effectually separated it from all human governments and plainly showed that the kingdom he alluded to was to be a spiritual reign of righteousness and holiness and peace in the hearts of men. By this answer he completely absolved himself from attempting to usurp the power of Cæsar. Although he had twice explained to Pilate the nature of his kingdom, the procurator persisted by saying, "Art thou a king then?" To this Jesus replied, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

A NEW CHARGE

It was now clear to Pilate that Jesus employed the word "king" in a sense other than that of a political ruler, but he displayed his want of understanding by his question, "What is truth?" His idea of what Jesus termed the truth was no less vague than that of mankind in general. A few before Jesus' time had glimpsed this truth, but he had come as the divinely appointed witness of it. He was king in this realm of truth in the sense that he was preeminent among all others in bringing it to light. Pilate was wholly ignorant of this realm of truth, but he was now convinced that it did not relate in any way to an earthly kingdom, and, without waiting for an answer to his question concerning it, he left Jesus alone and went out to the Jews. Mounting his judgment seat he pronounced his first emphatic acquittal by saying, "I find in him no fault."

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Up to this time the procedure as conducted by Pilate was in conformity with the Roman law. He had given Jesus a preliminary hearing as the law required, and had justly and fearlessly pronounced a judgment of acquittal. But from this time on his conduct was highly repugnant to a sense of refined and accurate justice. The record shows that from now on he made a desperate effort to save the prisoner and at the same time keep his own position; a struggle between what he saw was right and the necessity of saving himself from ruin and disgrace.

Greenleaf says of this acquittal: "Here was a sentence of acquittal, judicially pronounced, and irreversible except by a higher power, upon appeal; and it was the duty of Pilate thereupon to have discharged him." No lawyer will attempt to deny the soundness of this proposition.

A NEW CHARGE

Aiyar, who contended for the legality of the Roman trial but pronounced the Jewish trial a farce, does not even mention this acquittal by Pilate, an acquittal that completely and legally absolved Jesus from the accusation made before the procurator.

XXXVI

THE CHARGE OF SEDITION

THIS acquittal infuriated the enemies of Jesus and made them more than ever determined to have their way. They had spent many sleepless nights in plotting; they had, at great hazard to themselves, succeeded in turning the populace against him; and now to have their purpose foiled by a heathen was intolerable. The pronouncement of acquittal had scarcely escaped the lips of Pilate when a great roar of indignation went up from the Jews. They cried out, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewery, beginning from Galilee to this place."

THE CHARGE OF SEDITION

This was meant for an accusation of sedition of which Pilate would be bound to take cognizance. The crime of sedition consisted of attempts made, by meetings or speeches, or by publications, to disturb the tranquillity of the state, which do not amount to treason. In all such crimes exact justice requires that a corrupt motive be shown. No matter how incorrect the conduct of the accused, if his motive be pure and laudable, there can be no conviction. Jesus had been "teaching," as they asserted, but he taught charity, humility and love, a doctrine different from that of his accusers but acceptable to the people. True he had "stirred up the people" in that they became attached to him and followed him because his doctrine was friendly and consolatory to them. There was not the slightest intimation in this new charge that his acts and

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teachings were in derogation to the Roman rule, but it will be observed that their words embodied the real complaint of the Jews, namely, that his doctrine was an exposition of their hypocrisy and corruption. Whatever may have been their object in presenting this new accusation, Pilate seems to have ignored it altogether.

XXXVII

JESUS SENT TO HEROD

BUT at this juncture of this disgraceful procedure the "yellow" of the procurator began to manifest itself. The tumultuous manifestation of disapproval which followed his verdict of acquittal filled his frivolous heart with fear, and, as is characteristic of all moral cowards, he began to cast about for an avenue of escape from the performance of duty. The mere reference to Galilee in connection with the charge of sedition was a cue for Pilate to shift the responsibility to the shoulders of another. If Jesus be a Galilean he could turn him over to Herod Antipas,

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the tetrarch of Galilee, on the assumption that Herod alone had jurisdiction to try him. Obtaining from Jesus the admission that he was a Galilean, Pilate gave the order that he be taken before Herod, that official being in Jerusalem at the time.

At this the priests and elders shouted with approbation, for they began to fear that Pilate would release Jesus, and they thought that the reckless and vacillating Herod would do whatever would gain popular applause. But in this they were soon to be disappointed. Dragging Jesus to the Asmonæan palace, they renewed and urged their charges of treason and sedition before Herod. This official had heard of the wonderful miracles performed by Jesus and had a curiosity to meet and talk to him. The record says that Herod asked Jesus many questions, but whether or not they related to the

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charges made we are not informed. In any event we are told "he answered him nothing." Evidently incensed by this silence Herod "set him at nought," meaning thereby that he treated Jesus with insolence and contempt. Though the chief priests and scribes persistently urged their accusations before the tetrarch, he showed that he regarded them as frivolous and groundless by treating them with derision. Arraying Jesus in a gorgeous robe, in mockery of the garb of kingly power and authority, he sent him back to Pilate.

Herod, as the tetrarch of Galilee, had jurisdiction of offenses committed in Galilee. Inasmuch as the chief scene of Jesus' ministry had been in Galilee, it is fair to presume that the examination was the customary preliminary hearing upon the accusation made. If this be true, the

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act of Herod in sending Jesus away without rendering a decision one way or the other amounted to another acquittal. There had long existed an animosity between Pilate and Herod, and the latter evidently regarded the act of sending the prisoner to him a bid for a reconciliation. To show his perfect agreement with Pilate and the ridiculousness with which he himself regarded Jesus' pretended royalty, he arrayed him in a royal robe and sent him to Pilate.

XXXVIII

PILATE WASHES HIS HANDS

DISAPPOINTED but not dismayed, the accusers again dragged Jesus before Pilate, with a determination this time to force the Roman to render a decision in accordance with their wishes. Reviewing his former hearing in their presence Pilate said to them, "Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore

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chastise him and release him." This was Pilate's second positive pronouncement of acquittal. In making it he called attention to the fact that Herod had likewise found no fault in him. This is a direct refutation of the claim made by some that Pilate in condemning Jesus acted upon the recommendation of Herod. It also goes to show that Herod's act constituted an acquittal.

Although Pilate had now declared Jesus without fault for the second time, he was willing to compromise the matter with the accusers by chastising or scourging him. But why scourge an innocent man? If Pilate deemed Jesus deserving of scourging with rods, why did he pronounce him innocent? He evidently thought the infliction of physical pain on their victim would appease the wrath of the mob. Accordingly he proceeded, in

PILATE WASHES HIS HANDS

the presence of the crowd, to carry out his proposal by inflicting the punishment. This act of cruelty to one who had been proclaimed by its perpetrator as innocent was not only a flagrant violation of the law but wholly unworthy the dignity of a court of justice.

The execution of the judgment by flogging, whatever may have been its purpose, was a legal bar to further proceedings, and Jesus was entitled to his freedom. A rehearing of the case would have been another violation of that fundamental maxim of the Roman law that no man shall be twice put in jeopardy for the same offense. The record says, "From thence forth Pilate sought to release him."

Jesus was next led into the barrack-room of the guards and stripped of the white robe with which Herod had mocked him, and from the prætorian wardrobe

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they brought a cast-off war cloak, with its purple laticlave, and with feigned solemnity they buckled it on him. To complete the ceremony of a mock coronation he must have a crown upon his head. Twisting a green wreath of thorny leaves, they pressed it down over his brow in wanton mimicry of the imperial laurel, and placing a reed in his hand for a scepter, they led him before the multitude.

Turning to the tottering figure at his side, now drawn and bent with pain and weariness, the faded scarlet on his lacerated back, the crown of thorns on his pale, worn and bleeding brow, Pilate exclaimed in a tone of tender compassion, "Behold the man." But his appeal did not move the hardened hearts of the priests. The sight of their victim redoubled their ferocity, and they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him." In utter disgust Pilate

PILATE WASHES HIS HANDS

said to them, "Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him."

Still contending for the innocence of Jesus, and refusing to give the order for his crucifixion, yet he was willing to connive at their violation of the law. What the Jews wanted from Pilate was not tacit connivance but an absolute sanction, and they answered, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." The record says, "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid." He now began to tremble at the crime into which he was being drawn by fear and weakness. Again he took Jesus into the quiet of the judgment hall, and in awestricken tones said to him, "Whence art thou?" To this Jesus made no reply. Angered at this silence he said, "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power

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to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"

But Jesus was calm and unafraid. His perfect poise was the result of his having negated fear in his life. He did not fear that error could prevail over truth, that matter could prevail over spirit. He pitied the hopeless bewilderment of Pilate and gently answered. "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." In this he told Pilate he was less to blame than the Jews who had brought him there.

Pilate was now more anxious than ever to save him. Bringing him again before the multitude, he said to them in a tone of genuine conviction, "Behold your king." This redoubled the ferocity of the mob, and they cried out, "If thou let this man

PILATE WASHES HIS HANDS

go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." If thou lettest this man go the nation will accuse thee to thy master of favoring this Galilean's sedition. Pilate hesitates. He winces under the fury displayed before him. He fears a wrong interpretation of his finding will reach the ears of his sovereign. His struggle to release a man his common sense tells him is innocent is pitiable in its weakness in the face of the merciless malice echoed by the mob in its cry of "Crucify him, crucify him." A man of fortitude was required for such an emergency, but Pilate was not such a man. He was irresolute, unscrupulous and too unprincipled for the position that he held. He had alternately browbeat and cringed before the fanatical crowd, but he now realized he must make a choice between duty and the shedding of innocent blood. While

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between the voice of conscience and the fear of imperial vengeance, his noble wife sent him a message imploring him to "have thou nothing to do with that just man." Her appeal induced him to make one more effort to save Jesus. It was a custom during the feast of the Pass-over to liberate a prisoner designated by the people. Pilate hoped that it might be Jesus. He said to them, "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" But the mob called for the release of Barabbas, the notorious robber and murderer. "What will ye then that I should do with Jesus?" answered Pilate. To this they shouted, "Away with him, crucify him." With the hope that he might yet disarm the wily priests he said, "Shall I crucify your king?" As much as they hated Cæsar, they made a false display of

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loyalty by shouting, "We have no king but Cæsar."

The ferocity of the mob was unrelenting. Their screams for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus rang in the ears of the Roman until he weakened. When he "saw that he could prevail nothing," he released Barabbas and turned Jesus over to be crucified. In thus yielding to the wishes of the blood-thirsty priesthood, he set at naught that splendid legal maxim of the Roman law which says: "The idle clamour of the populace is not to be regarded when they call for a guilty man to be acquitted, or an innocent one to be condemned." (Law 12, Code de Pænis.) When he had thus condemned Jesus he took a basin of water and washed his hands before the multitude, at the same time saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person;

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see ye to it." Rather might he have washed his heart, stained as it was with innocent blood, shed by an act of his own weakness. He had smothered his own conscience, had trampled under foot the law of his native land, and acted alone on the fury of the Jewish priesthood.

XXXIX

CONCLUSION

THUS ended the darkest crime known to the history of jurisprudence. Two of the most enlightened systems of law that ever existed were prostituted in order to bring about the destruction of the most innocent man that ever lived. He was judged before he was tried. He was hunted down, not because he was a criminal, but because he was obnoxious to the ruling class of his own race. He was now condemned to die, not because the Sanhedrin had convicted him of blasphemy, not because the Roman magistrate had found him guilty of trea-

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son or sedition, but because of the cowardice of an ambitious and unscrupulous politician, superinduced by a base and sanguinary priesthood. His life was not sought as the lawful forfeit for crime, but through a conspiracy, itself unlawful, to prevent the loss of place and power. The poorest wretch that crawls the earth has the protection of the law that requires proof of the charges made against him, but Jesus was denied every privilege that was accorded the meanest citizen.

Jesus had endured unparalleled suffering and was soon to meet death in its most cruel form at the hands of those on whom he had conferred the greatest benefits. Yet he endured it all with patience and fortitude, knowing full well that it was the Father's will. He could have escaped the craftiness of the high priests and the blundering Roman procurator, but he

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fully realized that the hour had come for him to permit his body to be sacrificed in order to prove to humanity that the last enemy, death, can be overcome. He preferred to go on in the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Some have attempted to excuse his enemies on the ground that they were instruments in the hands of the Almighty in carrying out his decree. But no such merit can be made of their conduct. They were not aware of such plan. Their motives were marked with the foulest acts of perfidy, and the remorse of conscience struck deep into every malignant heart.

Deserted by all save his persecutors and a few weeping friends, Jesus was made to bear the burden of his cross to the place of the crucifixion. Here the world's chiefest tragedy is enacted. Here the Divine decree is consummated. Nailing

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his bleeding form to the cross; he is left to suffer and die amid the taunts and jeers of his enemies. The priests and elders stood by and mockingly said to him, "Thou wouldst save others; thyself thou canst not save. If thou art indeed the king of Israel, come down into the midst of us, and we will believe thee; since thou hast said, I am the son of God, let that God who loves thee come now to thine aid." The miserable wretches, not being satisfied with the accomplishment of their infamous purpose, were there to gloat over his suffering and to satisfy their morbid appetites with the spectacle of his death. They had many times asked him for a sign. Like Satan in the desert, they now wished for a prodigy. A miracle at this time would have deprived the world of the great object of his mission. He easily could have called into action forces

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that would have delivered him out of the hands of his slayers. He could have lifted up and spiritualized himself without having gone through the outer crucifixion and death on the cross. But if the physical manifestation of death and resurrection had not taken place, there would have been no superhuman fact in his ministry to call the world's attention to his divine nature and the divine nature of his mission on earth. His whole life had been one long struggle against misunderstanding, opposition, scorn, hatred, hardship, pain, and he had now come to the last act in the physical drama, a cruel death on the cross. By no less a sacrifice could the world be redeemed. To follow in the path of his sufferings, to bear our cross with him, this, and this only is to build our house upon a rock.

Without reiterating the many grossly

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illegal steps which preceded the sentence of death, we unhesitatingly conclude that Jesus, considered merely as a citizen of Judea, was not tried and sentenced according to law or according to existing forms of practise and procedure. It will be remembered that he was charged with and tried for three separate and distinct crimes. The Sanhedrin had tried and convicted him of blasphemy, but Pilate refused to take cognizance of this crime or give sanction for the execution of the sentence. He was accused of and tried for treason, but twice acquitted of that charge by Pilate. He was accused of sedition before both Pilate and Herod, but after a hearing he was acquitted of this charge by both magistrates. The inscription, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews," written over his head, indicated that he was executed under the pretense

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that he had been found guilty of treason. The fact is that the sentence was wrung from Pilate by threats and intimidation instead of being based upon evidence submitted. He let them execute Jesus as the cheapest way of keeping them quiet, on the pretended plea that Jesus had committed treason against Rome by saying that he was king of the Jews.

It would be beyond the scope of this discussion to relate the sad story of the execution of their illegal and unholy sentence. It is now the supreme moment of his last passion. It is Friday, the seventh day of April, and the great feast of the Passover is in full swing. Though the execution of a sentence of death was positively forbidden by law and custom to take place on a feast day, Jesus is now in the throes and agony of the crucifixion. The sun had hid his fair face since the

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sixth hour, refusing to shine upon the horrible spectacle. As the last dark billows roll over his soul, Jesus is heard to cry, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Forsaken and despised by all the world, he feels his faith slipping away. But in the very next breath we are assured he had received the divine comfort, for he exclaims, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And with these parting words he bows his head and is gone before the Judge of the world whose decree he has so nobly carried out.

THE END